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ABSTRACT

Sex role stereotyping by parents of male and female children was assessed by asking parents in 88 middle-class families to rate the importance of five broadly defined categories of attitudes they believed a 2-year-old should learn. All parents had at least one child 5 years old or younger. It was assumed that if sex role stereotyping was present, parents of males would highly rate the categories related to social behavior and exploration (defined in terms of independence and orientation to the world of work). It was assumed that parents of females would highly rate the categories related to family cooperation, appreciation for others, and the self (defined in terms of perseverance, imagination and passivity). Comparisons were made among the mean ratings given by parents who had only a male child, only a female child, multiple male children, multiple female children, and multiple children of both sexes. Findings indicated some stereotyping in families with more than one child of the same sex but no stereotyping in the other families studied. (CW)

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**Sex-Role Stereotyping in Select Families:
When and Where Does It Appear?**

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2. Abstract

This investigation was initiated because previous research with data from c. 1960 indicated that sex role stereotyping begins in families when children are very young. The sample was a highly select sample in 1973. Middle to upper middle class parents who participated in Union College Character Research Project's programs were asked to rate 5 areas of attitudes which in their opinion were important to teach 2 year old children. Hypotheses concerned with conventional sex role stereotyping were tested directly and indirectly with the 88 respondents. Sex role stereotyping was not expected in this select sample and was not found, except in families with more than one child of the same sex. Further study is indicated to determine whether or not the advent of a second child same sex as first child is particularly fertile for sex role stereotyping in other samples.

Sex-Role Stereotyping in Select Families: When and Where Does It appear?

Introduction

In 1973 the staff of the Union College Character Research Project completed a study entitled "What Is Most Important for a Two Year Old to Learn?" (Barber and Staff '73). We were surprised to find evidence of sex stereotyping on the part of parents of two and three year old children. Chi square analysis revealed that parents of a male child were more concerned that he be outgoing, manly and self-confident. In contrast, parents of a female child appeared to be concerned with the child's religious and school learning.

The data for the 1973 study were open-ended personality descriptions of their children written by parents in 1958-1960. It is the purpose of this study to investigate sex stereotyping in families in the 1970's. Does it still exist?

Serbin and O'Leary (1975) found clear evidence that nursery school teachers reinforce stereotypes. Boys are rewarded for aggression, curiosity and learning. Girls are rewarded for passivity, dependency and engaging in typical female-associated activities such as cooking. If teachers are still reinforcing sex-role stereotypes, it is certainly logical to suspect that parents are doing likewise.

Method

Sample

A highly select sample was used in this study. The 88 families involved were participants in Character Research Project programs. It

may thus be assumed that these parents were highly motivated to promote good character development in their children. All of these families had at least one child 5 years old or younger. The families were divided into three groups:

1. Thirty-seven families had only one child. The child was male in 26 of the families; female in the remaining 11 families.
2. Nineteen families had more than one child. All children were of the same sex. There were all male children in 11 families; all female children in 8 families.
3. The remaining 32 families had more than one child with both sexes represented.

These families were middle to upper middle class families. The ages of the parents were predominantly between 25 and 35 years of age. With few exceptions their attainment of a BA degree or higher represented their educational level.

The educational level is such that one might expect these parents to be "liberated" from sex-role stereotyping with little children. That expectation was tested in the following manner.

Procedure

In the spring of 1973, parents were sent the following letter. The letter was sent at that time because the Character Research Project (hereafter referred to as CRP) was in the process of creating a book for parents about two-year-olds.

Dear Parents:

We need your help! We are in the process of creating a book about two-year-olds and want to know what parents think is most important for a two-year-old to learn. We have selected five areas of attitude development and have

described each of these areas. You can help us by ranking these five attitude areas in the order of their importance for a two-year-old, as you see it.

Place a "1" in the box next to the attitude area you think is most important. Place a "2" in the box next to the attitude area you think is next most important. Continue in this way until you place a "5" in the box next to the attitude area you think is least important for a two-year-old to learn.

Please return this form to the Character Research Project as soon as possible. Thank you for your help.

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The form the parents received asked for education of parents, age of parents, employment of parents, and age and sex of children in the family. Finally, the form described the five areas of attitude development for the parents to rate. The following descriptions are exactly as received by the parents.

Description of Attitude Area:

POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Emphasizing this area involves teaching children to have fun in simple games, to participate in groups, to take care of themselves in group situations, to learn about how others feel, to learn what to do when they cannot have their own way, and to learn how to help others have a good time.

POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY COOPERATION

Emphasizing this area involves teaching children to take part in family routines (such as meals, rest time and bedtime), to take care of their own possessions, to take care of family possessions, to learn how to turn jealousy into constructive

behavior, to learn how to overcome angry rebellion through constructive behavior, and to help other members of the family.

POSITIVE ATTITUDES ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND THEM

Emphasizing this area involves teaching children to have fun learning new things, to enjoy discovering things for themselves, to recognize that their world is friendly and, also, to learn what the people around them do both at work and at play.

POSITIVE ATTITUDES ABOUT THEMSELVES

Emphasizing this area involves teaching children to persist in activities for longer periods of time, to use their imagination, and to react constructively when they cannot have their own way, rather than reacting with either anger or rebellion.

POSITIVE ATTITUDES OF APPRECIATION FOR OTHERS

Emphasizing this area involves teaching children to recognize what others do for them, to learn how to be like a parent when caring for other children, to share their own possessions with others, and to be able to teach someone who wants to know what they know.

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The reader will note that all statements in the Descriptions of Attitude Areas are stated in the positive. There was no negative sex-role stereotyping such as "passive" for females or "aggressive" for males. Thus, the instrument gave respondents no clue that stereotyping might be studied. In this respect the instrument was of clear value.

Even though parents were being asked to rate the attitude areas for a book about two-year-olds, of both sexes, the assumption was made that parents of male children might think "male" and parents of female

children might think "female" if sex-role stereotyping were present. Five hypotheses were tested:

1. Parents of a male or males will rate area 1 (Social) higher (of more importance) than parents of a female or females.
2. Parents of a female or females will rate area 2 (Family) higher than parents of a male or males.
3. Parents of a male or males will rate area 3 (World) higher than parents of a female or females.
4. Parents of a female or females will rate area 4 (Self) higher than parents of a male or males.
5. Parents of a female or females will rate area 5 (Others) higher than parents of a male or males.

Admittedly, the descriptions of the five attitude areas are broad and inclusive. However, if sex-role stereotyping were present, we assumed that parents of males would read into the Social and World areas the stereotype of a boy as outgoing, aggressive, independent and oriented to the world of work. We further assumed that parents of females would read into the areas of Family, the Self and Others the stereotype of a girl as family-oriented, passive, affiliative, dependent and serving toward others.

Analysis of the data consisted of t-tests in order to compare group mean ratings of the different combinations of groups and sub-groups. Tests of the hypotheses could only be tested directly when sub-groups were male vs. female. Since this testing was impossible with families where there were children of both sexes, other combinations were inspected in order to give non-direct tests of the hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays the means of parent ratings on the five attitude areas. Parents' ratings of only child-male are contrasted with parents' ratings of only child-female. There are no statistically significant

Insert Table 1 about here.

differences between male and female, $p \leq .10$. None of the five hypotheses is supported. It would appear that sex-role stereotyping is not present in these CRP families with only one child. What about the families with more than one child of the same sex? Table 2 gives these results.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Now we have a situation where differences appear. The lower mean represents a higher rating. Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4 are supported, while hypotheses 2 and 5 are not. Parents of all male children place higher priority on the Social and World attitude areas, while parents of all female children regard the area of Self as more important. The differences are greatest for the Self area: $p = .01$. However, there is some evidence of stereotyping on the part of these parents.

The following question can be asked: does a family with children of the same sex develop an image of itself that is sex-biased? Lenski ('61) suggests that care be taken when discussing prejudice (which he prefers to call "group image"). He believes that there are many rational reasons for group images. Is having children of the same sex a rational reason for sex-role stereotyping? Having children of both sexes might be another rational reason for a certain group image. We have relevant data.

Examine the results for families having children of both sexes. There were 32 such families. The ratings of parents of only child-male and the ratings of parents of only child-female were totaled. The assumption was made that these means for each of the five attitude areas represent a

non-stereotype set. We can then compare the means from parents with children of both sexes. Any differences might indicate stereotyping on the part of families with children of both sexes. The results are found in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here.

It would appear that sex-role stereotyping may appear in families with children of both sexes in the World area and in the Others area. Since we are not comparing males and females, we are not directly testing the hypotheses. It may be that what are seen as differences represents a different value system that is not related to sex-role stereotyping in families with children of both sexes.

The following results can be inspected: Comparisons between only child-male families and multiple mixed families, and only child-female families with multiple mixed families. It should be noted that these subgroups represent a comparison of a subgroup which is not exhibiting sex-role stereotyping with a subgroup which may possibly be displaying stereotyping. The results appear below in Tables 4 and 5.

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here.

It would appear that sex-role stereotyping is not present in these multiple mixed CRP families. There is no significant difference in either table for the Social, Family or Self areas. The difference in the World area favors the families with a single child-male. Since stereotyping appears to be absent in single child families, we would expect the difference to favor multiple mixed families. The opposite is true. The only consistent difference is found in the Others area.

It would thus appear that in families where multiple children are both sexes, sex-role stereotyping is not apparent. Families with multiple children of both sexes appear to place greater emphasis on getting along with others and on broader world perspectives. This emphasis is seen in contrast to single child families, where attention is apt to be focused on just the one child.

In conclusion, this study indicates that CRP families with only one child and CRP families with multiple children of both sexes do not appear to exhibit sex-role stereotyping. The results do indicate some stereotyping in CRP families with multiple children of the same sex. Is there something about a family having more than one child of the same sex that changes its group image and makes it fertile soil for sex-role stereotyping?

Answering the question of whether sex-role stereotyping is good or bad is not the intent or purpose of research. The implications are clear, however. For those who do make the value decisions about sex-role stereotyping in families, a crucial time in families may well be when a second child is born who is the same sex as the first child. This may be the time to decide whether to encourage or discourage sex-role stereotyping.

References

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Table 1. Comparison of Means of Parents' Ratings of Five Areas:
Parents of Only Child (one tail test)

	Social			Family			World			Self			Others		
	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t
males n = 26	3.41	1.01	.77	2.58	1.14	.49	3.12	1.33	.08	1.92	1.38	.32	4.24	.97	.04
females n = 11	3.09	1.14	ns	2.36	1.21	ns	3.16	1.28	ns	2.09	1.45	ns	4.27	1.10	ns

**Table 2. Comparison of Means of Parents' Ratings of Five Areas:
Parents of Multiple Children Same Sex (one tail test)**

	Social			Family			World			Self			Others		
	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t
males n = 11	2.64	.92	2.02	2.45	1.44	1.33	2.50	1.76	1.80	2.82	1.25	2.27	4.50	.71	.87
females n = 8	3.88	1.36	p $\leq$.05	1.75	.70	ns	3.63	.74	p $\leq$.10	1.63	.92	p $\leq$.01	4.31	.99	ns

Table 3. Comparison of Means Between Total Parents of Only Child
and Parents of Multiple Children of Both Sexes (two tailed)

	Social			Family			World			Self			Others		
	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t
Only child Total	3.30	1.05	.66	2.51	1.15	.89	3.11	1.31	2.40	1.97	1.38	.43	4.16	1.12	2.11
Multiple Both Sexes	3.50	1.39	ns	2.28	.99	ns	3.84	1.19	p<.02	1.84	1.22	ns	3.59	1.10	p<.05

Table 4. Comparison of Means Between Parents of Only Child-Male and Parents of Multiple Children of Both Sexes (two tailed)

	Social			Family			World			Self			Others		
	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t
Only child Male	3.41	1.01	.28	2.58	1.14	1.04	3.12	1.33	2.02	1.92	1.38	.23	4.24	.97	2.35
Multiple Both Sexes	3.50	1.39	ns	2.28	.99	ns	3.84	1.19	p<.05	1.84	1.22	ns	3.59	1.10	p<.05

Table 5. Comparison of Means Between Parents of Only Child-Female and Parents of Multiple Children of Both Sexes (two tailed)

	Social			Family			World			Self			Others		
	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t	$\bar{x}$	s.d	t
Only child Female	3.09	1.01	.94	2.58	1.14	.19	3.12	1.33	1.49	1.92	1.38	.50	4.24	.97	1.70
Multiple Both Sexes	3.50	1.39	ns	2.28	.99	ns	3.84	1.19	ns	1.84	1.22	ns	3.59	1.10	p<.10